

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Textile Society of America Symposium
Proceedings

Textile Society of America

2010

Locating Textile Arts Pedagogy: Do we ever settle?

Mary Lou Trinkwon

Capilano University, mtrinkwo@capilanou.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

Trinkwon, Mary Lou, "Locating Textile Arts Pedagogy: Do we ever settle?" (2010). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 55.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/55>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

**LOCATING TEXTILE ARTS PEDAGOGY:
DO WE EVER SETTLE? (CAN WE, SHOULD WE?)**

MARY LOU TRINKWON
mtrinkwo@capilanou.ca

INTRODUCTION: SETTLEMENT

I was deeply curious about this year's conference theme of Settlement and I found myself wondering how I might use this idea of Settlement to think about where I locate myself as a textile arts educator and textile artist, where I have settled and where I might like to settle as a textile arts educator and textile artist. I began using "Settlement" to think through some of my current preoccupations as a textile arts educator in particular. I began to think about settlement as a place - a place to discover and begin from, a place to stay and cultivate, even defend and perhaps a place to leave behind.

My conference presentation and my research revolves around issues within pedagogy, and the changing perceptions and realities of what education is, what an educator is, and how we as educators "meet" students in the relationship that is teaching and learning.

The educational and craft environments that I currently inhabit are ones that have long and complex histories, whose roots grow deep into the soil of Western philosophical thought, commerce and peoples desires to make things. Within the decade that I have been teaching I have continued to pursue ideas and issues within contemporary arts, cultural and educational theories always wondering how these issues may pertain to my textile arts curriculum. My particular teaching context is a two-year diploma program at Capilano University; a small publicly funded Canadian institution, a teaching university. Students work within two core disciplines of weaving and surface design. These core disciplines are complemented by other academic courses and electives with the objective of providing a broader context alongside the technical. It is within this two-year diploma that my settlement begins.

So what do I bring to my settlement? What are the important tools, materials and whom do I bring with me? Who do I find there? What is critical to the teaching and learning of Textile Arts? What do I choose to cultivate and what is already there to further develop? What is needed to feed and challenge the souls and intellects of both my students and myself? What medicine is necessary for wild craft to grow, to heal the stings and burns of teaching and learning?

It is with these questions in mind that I trek, looking for places to settle. Through out this journey I have drawn from many sources piecing together my own sense of what a textile arts educational settlement is, could or dare I say, should be? For this presentation I use craft, art and educational theory in order to locate, identify sifting and shifting through issues facing my textile arts pedagogy - hoping to move toward a place to "settle" into my own educational and artistic practices, as well as to inquire into our broader community settlement practices within the field of textile arts.

I begin by building upon a number of preoccupations some that have unsettled me, others that have helped to settle me. Despite the settling/unsettling aspects of these preoccupations, I have cultivated them. Through research, lived experience and practice, I continue to cultivate my settlement. In doing so I have found others who share my preoccupations, their work has allowed me to articulate and animate my preoccupations in ways not possible without them. So what are my current preoccupations my unsettling thoughts in relation to educational practice within the field of textile arts?

Preoccupations: post-disciplinarity, mastery, diy and relationality

Post-disciplinarity: infidelity or expanding the settlement?

The term "postdisciplinarity" evokes an intellectual universe in which we inhabit the ruins of outmoded disciplinary structures, mediating between our nostalgia for this lost unity and our excitement at the intellectual freedom its demise can offer us.¹

Julie A. Buckler

Towards a New Model of General Education at Harvard College

The concerns inherent in my question; "Post-disciplinarity: infidelity or Expanding the Settlement?" are captured in Julie Buckler's quote above. Change means doing things differently, which can be embraced as a positive challenge, or viewed as a threat when seen as compromise and loss. My question is "What would we give up and what would we gain?" My concerns for post-disciplinarity are motivated by a sense of fidelity to the discipline which I perceive in the larger textile arts community as well as within my self, teaching surface design within a textile arts department. I put into question here the process of knowledge acquisition and the very nature of that knowledge for students in a foundations level program. I also put into question methods for art making as well as possibilities for teaching strategies within institutional structures. My question regarding my fidelity to the discipline is influenced externally by persistent current post disciplinary discourse within education and art making. These influences make me both curious and yet fearful when I imagine removing walls between disciplines to inhabit the ruins, to expand the settlement.

Thinking about moving my textile arts educational settlement into a post disciplinary model raises many questions about the nature and value of discipline based teaching. Yet given textiles arts broad applications and professional practices it might already be inherently a post-disciplined discipline. The question of "Infidelity or the only way to go forward?" leads me to my current educational settlement where my fear of inhabiting these ruins is countered by a yearning for the possibilities imagined of what a post disciplined settlement might offer myself and my students within textile arts. I have begun to question my departments' attachment to a discipline - based model and have been surprised by my own sense of betrayal and I have wondered what these strong feelings of unfaithfulness are about? Are they simply tied to a romantic notion of tradition that uphold the very reason that my department exists independently, or would a post -disciplined model for textile arts education be the best for my department, my students and the practice of textile arts education? This feeling of betrayal is further exacerbated by the fact that it was only since the early 80's that my department won its independence as a discipline in its own right, as it's own settlement, apart from, the studio art department.

By throwing disciplined based learning into question I am also putting into question mastery. I find it difficult to imagine the end of disciplinarity for textile arts education without imagining the end of the old master. Based on my current settlement practices there is no discipline without a master and there is no master without a discipline and yet this is exactly what I want to divide in my new considerations for settlement. This brings me to my next preoccupation.

The ignorant schoolmaster: pedagogical suicide or real freedom?

The notion of teacher as master/expert and methods for occupying such positions that have been the norm in craft education as well as the field of education, are challenged by the proposition put forward by Jacques Ranciere (1940-) in his 1987 work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual*

¹ Julie A Buckler. *Towards a new model of general education at Harvard College*. Buckler 2004. Pg 2. Web. August 5 2010.

Emancipation. Ranciere narrates the story of Joseph Jacotot, a French scholar and educational philosopher (1770-1840), who successfully “taught” students who spoke a different language from his own, and on several other occasions “taught” successfully outside of his own area of “expertise”. Jacotot’s three philosophical principles for “Universal Teaching” are as follows: One: everyone is of equal intelligence. Two: access to intelligence is a matter of will. Three: learning is a process whereby the learner strengthens their will. Therefore learning is an act of will.

According to Ranciere, Jacotot came to realize that knowledge is not necessary to teaching, nor explication necessary to learning. What is at stake here for Ranciere is that it is only through the death of mastery that equality can manifest in order for learning to take place. His claim for the classroom is “we are all equals here and we all have a lot to learn from one another”. Ranciere captures my full attention, because I have struggled with the “position” of “master” in my classroom. When I became a teacher, part of my struggle was that I felt I was required to accept this position of “master”, even though I never thought or conducted myself from that position.

For me in 2010 to view my teaching practice through Jacotot’s “Universal Teaching” principles, born during the French Revolution and Ranciere’s post-Marxist’s politics of the 1960’s, is a challenging affair indeed if not preposterous. Yet I am willing to view through these lenses in order to perhaps gain new insight into my teaching practice and populate my settlement with these propositions. To stand before my class and to stand before you here and tell you I am not a master educator nor expert surface designer is both a liberating and vulnerable if not self-annihilating stake to claim. It also doesn’t look good in mission statements or advertising.

“Mary Lou Trinkwon Textile Art Instructor Capilano University, good enough instructor, will meet you as an equal, and if you are willing, strengthen your will to learn about surface design.”

I think what is most important to Ranciere’s provocative erasure of mastery is directly linked to the end of disciplinarity. In Textile Arts, because we are so technically and discipline focused one would assume that mastery over a technique or discipline would put you in a position to teach that technique or discipline. It has been my experience however, that mastery over technique, although it does not exclude you from teaching, it does not inherently place you in a position to teach. A whole lot more is in the balance. Delivery of information, passion, curiosity, excitement, motivation, and learning is a process where students are activated. It is the conversation, the collaboration that is teaching and learning. The learning environment must allow for the freedom to explore, experiment, question and yes even fail. It is here that I might settle on Vygotsky’s mediated action, that dynamic triad between teacher, learner and subject. Or Lave’s situated learning, outside of the classroom and in the field, in the situation, to cite two examples from many.

To put the discipline into question we eroded the master. To put the master into question, we create the equality necessary for learning. This leads me to my third preoccupation. Without a doubt the DIY phenomenon, its embrace of new technologies, its democratization, its worship of the handmade, and its use of social networks for education and trade, has brought and upset the current settlement with its new energy and agency.

Diy culture: implications for curriculum

Another challenge to the teacher as expert/master and institutional learning itself comes from the DIY movement. Its anthem of accessibility and inclusion challenge not only disciplinarity and mastery but also institutional ways of learning. Self professed DIYer, Katherine Sharps, editor of Ready-made writes, “Where craftsmanship stands for mastery and tradition, DIY suggests improvisation and inclusion.” Garth Johnson, DIYer, educator, entrepreneur writes in, *How Bazar: The Beating Heart of DIY*

*It's a movement built around physical objects and personal interaction that couldn't exist without the Internet. It's all about teaching people to do things for themselves, but also about branding and consumption.*²

These claims have powerful implications for my current textile arts educational settlement. In its turn toward equality, skills for all and the promise of everyone doing it for themselves, the DIY movement has turned away from professional validation or credentialing, which alongside disciplinarity and mastery, form the corner stone of curriculum and instruction within public educational institutions. By positioning itself outside of the traditional settlement, it would seem that the DIY movement has pulled the veil off of current traditional or institutional textile arts practices. With so many hitching their wagons to the DIY movement and moving into this new settlement, I am feeling the migration of my students to some of this new settlement. Interestingly, many of the DIY leaders are highly educated and credentialed from many prestigious institutions. My point here is not to debate the complexities of this settlement; my concern is the devaluing of education and the potential loss of students. And while part of me wants to join this wild migration, embracing inclusion, equality, invention, individual expression, values I to am deeply aligned with, I remain deeply committed to public education at a post-secondary level, and value professionalism and credentialing, not in and of themselves, but as integral, life giving goals.

In addition to this, I have many thoughts and questions about the DIY movement and its implication for textile arts and for my own teaching settlement. I am deeply curious about the fetishization of the handmade. I am also curious and unsettled by the DIY's redeployment of the domestic. From a second wave feminist position, I have many questions about current gender analysis within the third wave. I am also deeply curious by the DIY's use of the internet and free market capitol, its impact on aesthetics and its impact on the desires and motivations that people have for making things.

And on very cynical days, when my maternal despot is raging, when I feel the most defended, I wonder if DIY is just another romantic movement. I realize that in asking these questions I am showing my own biases but I do so in order to flush out and make transparent my own concerns, questions, and struggles as I try to get at what all this means for myself and my students and textile arts education.

I know this all sounds like I am simultaneously being drawn to, as well as moving away from the DIY settlement/movement. I get that the DIY movement is a very diverse movement, and how people take it up is as diverse as the movement itself. Perhaps I have a lot to learn about the DIY and from the DIY movement, but in all of its challenges and claims and in the face of the very real threat of losing potential students with programs collapsing and closing because everyone can DIY, without a discipline, without a master and without an institution! It is at this point that I wonder, "What it is that I have to offer? And it is from this paradoxical position that leads me to my final preoccupation.

Navigating the relational field: between you and me.

*the knowledge offered through pedagogy meets the knowledge brought to pedagogy*³

My interest in relationality traverses several areas within pedagogy. My main area of interest is within psychoanalytic theories for education, where transference and object relations theory combine to animate textile arts teaching and learning in ways that cannot be predicted or accounted for. In these theories the

² *Society for Contemporary Craft*. DIY : A Revolution in Handicrafts. Web. August 5 2010.

³ Britzman, Deborah, P. (1998). Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning. Albany: State University of New York. Pg. 5

classroom is seen as transitional space. It has to do with past experiences and future desires of both teacher and student. It encompasses power and authority and provides opportunities for understanding ourselves and our work through our relations with others. Elizabeth Ellsworth best describes this when she rearticulates Winnicott's notion of transitional space and its use for educators, she writes:

What Winnicott's notion of transitional space suggests to us as educators is this: The limits of our knowledge of self, of others, and of the world require us to put ourselves in relation while at the same time keeping ourselves separate. What we cannot know requires us to constantly traverse the porous boundaries between self and other, individual and social, personal and historical. We cannot know self in absence of separate different others. We cannot know others in absence of self. We cannot know only through distinction, difference, and cutting, and we cannot know only through connecting, integrating, and cohering.⁴

Let me illustrate the transitional space or the relational field by telling a story about my classroom, a story that repeats itself with greater frequency than ever. I am about to demo silk-screening, and students say, they saw it all on utube. Given this perceived totality of knowledge acquisition, delivered equitably and unboudaried by time and space, I wonder what do I have to offer? Should I just go home? Are my students wondering the same thing?

Coming out of the DIY movement its all about donin it for yourself! But it's actually never really done by yourself; the learning in the DIY movement is always mediated through some kind of structure a group a workshop a magazine, utube. What I am thinking about and what I am saying in questioning disciplinarity, mastery and do it yourself is my questioning how I position myself within textile arts, and what continues to motivate me to enter the classroom. Because I am not a master, I enter the classroom as myself and I can't help be influenced and be impacted by all the others, the knowledge's and conditions that I find there and take up there. This is where the navigation begins, "where the knowledge offered through pedagogy meets the knowledge brought to pedagogy."

Clearly I am biased towards my privileging the relational encounter within the transitional space that is the classroom within the institution. For me the self is central to knowledge acquisition, while I would never argue that Utube doesn't offer my students something about surface design, I see it as strengthening the students' will to learn, I feel even stronger however, that the structure offered in institutional learning and the relational field in the classroom grounds the student to something vital, rigorous and critical to their development as textile artists. It is "in and between" all of this that the potential for critical pedagogy is built. It is everything that happened, could happen, didn't happen - the navigation between you and me. It is this potential that is at the heart of my settlement.

Conclusion: do we settle, should we settle, can we settle?

I bring the ideas of post-disciplinarity and the philosophical ideas of French philosophers from the 18 and 19 centuries to my settlement, asking how relevant can these post-Marxist theories be to my 21century classroom/settlement, populated with diverse political generations, diyer's, and multi ethnic and cultural minds?

I bring psychoanalytic theories and the freedom and equality inherent in DIY into my settlement as I reach out from myself, beyond myself to meet my students - struggling to understand, at the same time maintaining a level of criticality.

⁴ Ellsworth, Elizabeth. (2005). Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy. New York: RoutledgeFalmer. Pg. 61

Why am I bringing all this with me? Why do I pack and unpack in this way? Because in my settlement, in the spirit of post-disciplinarity, I look from the ruins I inhabit to what is there now and what has been built upon hoping to discover more from other disciplines in applying their methods to my practice. Within my settlement in the spirit of deferral of mastery, I leave my conclusions unfinished to ensure I always have more questions. I leave my conclusions open to more rigorous experimentation and perhaps testing from others who are curious and will question my ideas. In the spirit of DIY and Ranciere, I turn from explication and attempt to engage the wills of students in order for them to truly Do it for themselves. And in the spirit of relationality I meet my students in this new settlement, as unsure of it as they might be in order to discover, to create and build pedagogy together.

Do we settle? Yes. This is how we get things done.

Can we settle? Yes of course, this is the navigation.

Should we settle? Well, I know I can't and for the sake of pedagogy, and progressive/critical education I hope we never will.

Bibliography

Julie A Bucker. *Towards a new model of general education at Harvard College*. Bucker 2004. 3 pages. Web. August 5 2010.

Bingham, Charles & Sidorkin, Alexander, M. (Eds), (2004). *No Education Without Relation*. New York: P. Lang.

Britzman, Deborah, P. (1998). Lost Subjects, Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry of Learning. Albany: State University of New York.

Buckley, Brad & Conomos, John. (Eds). (2009). *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist , the PhD, and the Academy*. Halifax: NSCAD University.

Ellsworth, Elizabeth. (2005). Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Madoff, Steven Henry. *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*. 2009. Cambridge. MIT.

Ranciere, Jacques. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University.

Society for Contemporary Craft. DIY : A Revolution in Handicrafts. Web. August 5 2010.

Tobin, Kenneth & Kincheloe, Joe. (Eds). 2006. *Doing Educational Research: A Handbook*. Rotterdam: Sense.